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ABSTRACT

A Swedish study examined student and teacher perceptions regarding career education (CE) and working life orientation in Sweden's lower secondary schools. Twenty-seven pupils and a total of 30 school professionals (13 teachers, 8 career teachers, 3 school welfare officers, and 6 head teachers) from 3 lower secondary schools were interviewed. The school personnel generally believed the following: the foremost goal of CE is to aid pupils in their choice of educational courses and vocations; the main methods of achieving this goal are provision of career information to groups, individual counseling, and work experience programs; and intellectually weak, socially handicapped, and indecisive pupils should be targeted as priority groups for CE. Pupils generally felt that school is not preparing them sufficiently for working life and that school has not helped them increase their self-awareness as much as experiences outside school, parents, peers, and others have. The following actions were recommended: pupils' experiences should be used as a platform for classroom lessons; syllabi should be linked to society and working life; CE should be provided to ninth-grade students; resources for individual counseling should be increased; and more attention/time should be given to CE in teacher training programs. (MN)

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CAREERS EDUCATION CULTURE IN SCHOOLS

Pupil's and school personnel's perception of careers education and working life orientation in lower secondary schools

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CAREERS EDUCATION CULTURE IN SCHOOLS

Pupil's and school personnel's perception of careers education and working life orientation in lower secondary schools

Lennart Henrysson

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This booklet presents a study focusing on how careers education and working life orientation are perceived by pupils and school personnel at som lower secondary schools in Sweden. By analysing interviews from about 60 persons different opinions are classified.
The following factors signify the school's career education culture:

* Certain traditional conceptions that have been resistant to change
* Pressure groups that accentuate different aspects of careers education and thereby expose contrasting relationships
* Different opinions have difficulty in gaining penetration power in the entire careers education cultural pattern.

Keywords: Careers education, careers teacher, educational and vocational guidance, guidance counselling, guidance counsellor, work experience programme, working life orientation.

Background and aim

The background

Careers education (syo) and working life orientation are integral parts of the responsibility of the schools in preparing pupils for adulthood and working life. The Swedish National Curriculum for compulsory schooling states clearly that careers education is a concern for all who work within school. Careers teachers (syofunktionär; here used as a term defining both careers teachers and guidance counsellors) act as coordinators and are responsible for individual counselling, spreading educational and vocational information and executing certain administrative duties. Other professionals in the school, especially teachers also take an active part in working life orientation by, for example, following up the periods of practical work experience (prao) that their pupils have had and by seeking to integrate knowledge of working life into their teaching.

Whether or not schools are successful in preparing pupils to make educational choices and to adequately cope with working life depends to a large extent on the school's careers education culture ("syo-kultur"). By careers education culture, I mean the pupils' and the school personnels' opinions of, and willingness to act in the development of careers education. This dissertation, entitled *Careers education culture in schools*, illuminates how careers education and working life orientation are perceived by pupils and school personnel in a number of lower secondary schools in Sweden.

The aim of this work

The purpose is accordingly:

1) to describe how the goals and the function of careers education are perceived by the personnel at certain lower secondary schools,
2) to describe how pupils and personnel at these schools perceive the competence, enthusiasm and responsibility of the people concerned with and responsible for careers education,
3) to describe how the pupils at the schools comprehend their preparation for working life and how well they feel that they have been prepared to make educational and vocational choices,
4) to describe the possible deviations of opinions discovered by the study, between participants in the study or between the schools and finally
5) to find factors that explain the careers education culture prevalent in these schools.

So, the aim of this study is to show the variety of opinions concerning careers education. Further it is my intention to lay the ground for a more functional careers education and working life orientation and a better careers education culture in schools.

Method

School personnel and pupils from three lower secondary schools recruited from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds together with a further three careers teachers from other schools in the same town have been interviewed about their views on careers education and working life orientation. A total of 30 school professionals (13 teachers, 8 careers teachers, 3 school welfare officers and 6 head teachers /skolledare/) and 27 pupils have been interviewed.

On analysing the results, a social anthropological model by Ralph Linton was used to classify the different opinions. Consequently, opinions shared by all interviewed groups are classified as *universals*. Opinions held by only one or two of the groups but not shared by the others are classified as *specialties*. Finally, deviating opinions that are only held by the odd member of a group, are classified as *alternatives*.

A number of theories relevant to this study have then been used in order to try to explain the differences in opinions that have arisen. Besides Linton's theory on cultural changes, also organisation theories, school curriculum theories and theories on innovation have been used to illuminate the careers education culture identified by means of this study.

The results

The perception of careers education amongst pupils and school professionals.

The study shows that the interviewed personnel from the schools included in the study perceived the foremost goal of careers education to be aiding the pupils in their choice of educational courses and vocations. The methods used to achieve the goal are mainly collective information, individual counselling and work experience programmes. There is also agreement that intellectually weak, socially handicapped and indecisive pupils are priority groups.

Generally the interviewed persons are satisfied with the school's careers

education, defining careers education as work done by the careers teacher. Another, less favourable picture, is presented by the guidance counsellors (syokonsulent), one or two head teachers and school welfare officers. They feel that working life orientation and integrating working life into the syllabus is not prevalent in the classroom, an opinion verified by the pupils. Several of the teachers claim to be engaged in different ways in the school's careers education and working life orientation. They say that they relate to working life in their lessons. It is mainly the teachers of Swedish and social studies who are engaged in following up the practical work experience of the pupils.

The careers teacher has, according to the other interviewees, responsibility for the careers education work and working life orientation. Several are however aware of the fact that the headmaster is responsible for all school functions and is therefore even responsible for careers education. Only one head teacher pointed out that careers education is the joint responsibility of all who work in the school.

The pupils do not feel that the school gives them sufficient preparation for working life where working conditions differ greatly from those to which they are accustomed in school. Even the school personnel feel that the school provides inadequate preparation for working life. Preparing the pupils for higher education, (particularly the upper-secondary school) is a task in which the school has had more success.

The careers teachers give a more varied description of the contents and goals of careers education than the other professionals and express that if careers education is going to function well it is necessary to establish good working relations with both teachers and head teachers. They see themselves as a resource that could be better used by the teachers in both planning and executing lessons on working life.

The teachers criticise their own basic training and also feel that they have not received the necessary in-training that would enable them to integrate careers education into their teaching in accordance with the goals of the curriculum.

The head teachers and the school welfare officers express the opinion that especially intellectually weak, socially handicapped and indecisive pupils should be classed as priority groups for careers education.

The pupils feel that it is of great importance that the careers teacher really cares for them and has sufficient time to help them. They feel that the time designated by the school for work experience placements (6 - 10 weeks) should be extended to give a more realistic and widened perspective of working life. When asked about the school's goal to make them more

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self aware, they feel that this is only marginally possible, especially in the context of the classroom. They feel that it is mainly their experience outside school, parents, peers and other contacts that help them become self aware.

Universal, specific and alternative opinions

The *universal* opinions about careers education are primarily associated with the careers teacher, his/her person and work. They conserve the opinion that careers education is a task for an expert and this leaves little room for it to be the responsibility for all who work in the school. Teachers are only marginally engaged.

The *specific* opinions offer a picture of different views and values in different groups. The most obvious deviation is in the opinions of the pupils where criticism is aimed at the school's information, the role of the parents and the school's lack of ability to enhance self awareness.

The *alternative* opinions may incite changes. One head teacher is for example of the opinion that school work should be brought more into parity with that found in working life or, the opinion of one teacher who thought that work experience should be one of the qualifications demanded of applicants seeking admittance to teacher training courses. The following factors signify the schools' careers education culture:

* Certain traditional conceptions that have been resistant to change
* Pressure groups that accentuate different aspects of careers education and thereby expose contrasting relationships
* Different opinions have difficulty in gaining penetration power in the entire careers education cultural pattern.

The different schools' careers education culture

To summarise the picture that emerges of the careers education culture at the three schools is on the one hand one of great similarities in the careers education culture expressed by the personnel's goals and the organisation in the schools. On the other hand, however there are large discrepancies in the day to day working arrangements. Thus, such comparisons show:

(1) The attitudes and competenses of individuals and groups within the schools

* that the *headmaster's* attitude is the basis for the prevaling careers education culture. The status of the subject careers education at any given school is to some extent dependant on him/her,
* that the *careers teacher* plays an important role by for example, his/her ability to create good relations with teachers and school administrators

and by his conduct toward pupils,

* that the *teachers'* backgrounds and their working life experiences outside the school influence their interest for, and ability to, create links between work in the classroom and working life,

(2) External factors

* that the *geografical position* of the school influences the inclination of the school personnel to establish contacts with industry,
* that extra *resources* received by the school due to a high percentage of immigrant pupils influence the opportunities to satisfy the pupils' special needs for help and support,

(3) The general school culture

* that the *general attitudes of school personnel* to the pupils as a whole, determine the school climate and thereby also the school's careers education culture and
* that the *cooperative climate* predominant in the school also will effect cooperation within the area of careers education.

As the above circumstances have different forms and conditions at the different schools, what I call here the careers education culture will vary from school to school.

This limits the possibility to generalise the results of this study. It is on the other hand safe to assume that the identification of *factors that influence the careers education culture* has a high grade of universality. This makes it possible to identify circumstances that make the development of a favourable careers education possible. The different factors influence each other which makes it difficult to identify any single factor of greater importance than any other. One may dare to say that a good careers education culture should be characterised by the following:

* that the careers teacher gives priority to counselling and is involved in the pupils' situation, participates in the planning and teaching of subject areas concerned with educational and vocational aspects and conveys the latest information to the pupils, parents and school personnel,
* that the teachers have had first hand experience of working life outside the school and that they, in their training, have been prepared to handle questions in the field of careers education and to link classroom work to working life and for this purpose use the careers teacher as a resource,
* that administrative and organisational changes are made to facilitate contacts with industry and working life,
* that extra resources for careers education, allocated to schools in accordance to their needs, make it possible to provide for immigrant children and other pupils that for different reasons are in special need of

extra help with their educational and vocational choices,

* that the general attitude of school personnel is one of openness toward the wills and wishes of pupils and an ability to fullfil their needs and
* that cooperation between and within different groups of personnel functions without friction and is characterised by openness, flexibility and the will to integrate.

The last two factors show that careers education must be interpreted and understood as a part of the general school culture.

Opinions on careers education from the perspective of different theories

The rather diffuse picture of careers education given by all the interviewed except the careers teachers can partly be explained by the fact that careers education is, as an organised school activity, a rather new phenomenon and as Svingby points out, it lacks historical and traditional makings.

The explicit goals of the school and of careers education to give the pupils knowledge about working life, to counteract careers choices made due to gender and to increase the pupils' self awareness is mentioned, apart from the careers teachers, by very few of the interviewees. These goals are obviously not issues commonly associated with careers education. Many of the topics designated by the central government to the subject area called careers education have not seeped through to the local school.

Despite the fact that the conditions formally can be said to be fullfilled at the local level, it appears that the teachers' interpretations and basic pedagogical views can partially explain the shortcommings of careers education. The central government does not, according to Svingby, enforce the national documents. These are instead open to interpretation at different levels, whereby historical and social factors have great influence. The National Curriculum appears in this light to be a rather failing document concerning superimposed areas such as careers education. To use the terminology of the Curriculum Committee, the *implemented* curriculum is not in parity with the *legislated* curriculum.

The fact that teachers and school administrators claim that they lack training and competence necessary to conduct careers education in the manner specified by the curriculum can be seen as the type of framework and rules that according to Lundgren limit and regulate the school's activities. The careers education culture in a school is closely knit to the basic views by the school personnel regarding knowledge, man and society.

The local school's careers education culture is then only in part defined by the expectations expressed in governmental documents. Each individual teacher's interpretations and experiences are decisive for how careers

education is conducted in the school. The teachers' lack of training and historic traditions in the area concerning careers education explain the discrepancy between the ideal curriculum model and the realities of the local school.

To summarize, it can be said that the more personalised activities conducted by the careers teacher with individual pupils have been recognised as being well in accordance with the curriculum. The collective responsibility for careers education and the integration with other school activities, on the other hand, stand out as unknown or foreign to most of the school personnel.

Careers education in the complicated organisation of the school is dependant on several factors. The structure of society, history and traditions influence laws, decrees, curricula and other official documents. At the implementation level, local rules are found that do not harmonise with the national level. The curriculum for example states a six to ten weeks work experience programme for all pupils during their nine compulsory school years. None of the schools in the study reach even the minimal level of six weeks.

Teachers wishing to visit pupils at their placements are often hindered by the school timetable. Even a negative change in economic terms for teachers making placement visits has lessened their will to do so.

Careers teachers who have their own experience of working life and who consider themselves well versed in the field of educational and vocational guidance, work zealously with the school's careers education programme and are appreciated for their work by the other employees and a majority of the pupils.

The pupils are the most important single group in the school. Despite this they have in reality, partly owing to their age and partly due to subordination, only a limited opportunity to influence the planning of careers education and working life orientation.

The headmaster's role in forming the careers education programme is not only limited to his formal responsibility for all activities within the school. His attitude to the different aspects of careers education and his support to the careers teacher and his/her work has a great impact on how the careers education culture develops in his school.

It is obvious that the goals for careers education and working life orientation stipulated by the curriculum and other documents have only partially been implemented at the schools included in this study. Work experience programme, which is amongst the most concrete of activities, has a high esteem among a majority of the interviewees. It seems that this

method gives the pupils a good insight into working life, even if better use of the pupils' experiences could be made in the classrooms than is the case. A link to working life is also apparent in the subject social studies but hardly in other subjects.

There are many reasons why the government's intentions concerning changes in careers education have not been implemented. From the perspective of innovation theory, methods of spreading information and the reception of information play important roles. The main method of spreading information at the introduction of the 1980 curriculum was by mass communication (macrosystem for dissemination) and this was preceded by a discussion on the internal workings of schools. Very little was at that time said about careers education and working life orientation.

On the subject of preparedness for change it can, in summary, be said that the level of awareness among the personnel regarding how change should be handled seems to be very low. Nothing has for example been said in the interviews about careers education being discussed at the teachers' planning meetings or that any in-training has been offered in this field. The local careers education plan (lokal arbetsplan) does not seem to fill any real function at schools where there is one.

The goals for careers education are of a relatively general character and are spread in several different documents, which may make it difficult to get the picture of the whole programme. It is not specified who should do what, a fact which makes it easy to hide behind the expression "the school must".

The careers teachers, who are the schools' experts in this field, have different work climates at different schools. Being a successful innovation agent necessitates the respect of the rest of the personnel and the ability to encourage them to work with careers education. Of the careers teachers in the study, I feel that a little more than half are well established at their schools and enjoy sufficient respect by the rest of the personnel to facilitate changes in the right direction. On the other hand this fact has the effect on the rest of the personnel that they feel "things are good the way they are". The remainder of careers teachers appear to work without inspiration in a routine way or, as in one case with resignation. To work as an innovation agent under such conditions does, needless to say, not promote careers education at that school.

Conclusions

The study shows that careers education at the studied schools is perceived to partially function satisfactorily. It does also identify serious problems, above all those related to giving pupils sufficient knowledge about educational opportunities and a working life orientation that will enable them to make realistic and carefully prepared educational and vocational choices. To reach this goal it is neccessary for the personnel to take a more active roll in the careers education process. It should be possible for careers teachers and other teachers to gain practical experience outside the school, by among other things, making it easier for them to visit pupils on work experience placements but also by enticing them with longer periods of practical work outside the school. With a greater knowledge of working life on the part of the teachers, a more natural integration of the pupils' practical work experience and links between working life and the school syllabus would result. An argument may be made in support of a much larger period of practical work experience for pupils than that experienced by pupils in the study. Indeed the same argument applies to any form of contact with working life outside the school provided that it is a natural part of, and integrated into, the normal classroom teaching.

Using the experiences of the pupils as a platform for classroom lessons and linking the syllabus to society and working life and even organising school work in a similar fashion to the organisational forms found in working life, would better prepare the pupils for the transition from school to working life and adulthood.

Putting, for example, careers education on the timetable for ninth grade pupils and increasing the resources for individual counselling would guarantee all pupils both the individual counselling and the collective information that they need to be able to reflect on and constructively plan their future. To increase the pupils' self esteem at a period in their lives when they are seeking an identity, the school ought to arrange developmental discussions in small groups similar to those at two of the schools in the study. One teacher suggested that the school careers office could be converted into a careers centre ("syotek") where pupils could go for individual counselling and also to search among the information brochures on education, occupations and working life.

Greater attention and more time should be given to the subject careers education in teacher training programmes. The trainee teachers must be given greater theoretical knowledge and more practical experience of how to handle questions about careers education and working life orientation.

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Even in-training schemes on this subject are imperative if school personnel is to gain the level of competence neccessary to make them feel that careers education is "the responsibility of all" and is an integrated part of school life in the manner prescribed by the curriculum.

The future careers education programme

In the new curriculum for the compulsory school (December, 1993), the responsibility for careers education has been clarified. The careers teacher will, if his/her resources are unchanged, have a greater opportunity to conduct individual counselling. Working life orientation must be planned at the local school level and is to be included in the minimum specified syllabus (expressed as teaching hours) for all curriculum subjects. The dimensioning of the work experience programme is a matter for the local school. These changes can lead to a greater interest in careers education but the risk is that it may be watered down even further. The most important factor concerning the future of the school's careers education programme is how strongly the new curriculum is implemented at the local level.

A prerequisite for a good careers education programme in the future is that the different groups of adults working in schools receive in their professional training the neccessary competence to become committed and participative in careers education and to develop a rewarding co-operation within the school and with society and industry outside.

Finally it can be said that, from the point of view of the careers education programme, the intentions expressed in the new curriculum are positive. If this curriculum is to be implemented in the schools, it will be necessary to combine information about the changes with other steps. Apart from a stronger accentuation of careers education in teacher training programmes, it will also be necessary to give in-training courses to raise the competence of teachers, headmasters and careers teachers so that they can cope with the problem of careers education in accordance with the government's intentions.

Further research

Continued research and development work can help to bring shortcomings in the area of careers education to light. In such work a clearer emphasis should be placed on the role of pupil and parental commitment.

The expected changes to careers education caused by the new

curriculum should be monitored and analysed.

Another important task is to examine how the basic training programmes for teachers and guidance counsellors are preparing them to handle careers education and working life orientation in the schools.4

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